

William McKenna

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One

"It's a drought year and everything seems fine. It shouldn't be that way, should it? I cussed off William the other day and brought his wife down— to the creek. What a fine time. She kicks, I can tell you. I've never had such good cunt as I've had with that woman.

"What a fine time. The sun *is* shining today. I *am* sterling today. William's father is in the hospital—said it's his heart again, new day again. Fundamental. I stayed up with Ma last night. She knitted. I held the cat and watched the television. Fundamental.

"Next day, down at the creek William's wife lay naked for me, again; for me alone, again. 'Cept the critters, 'course. Now that's an ailment that my father never did tell me about. Jesus knows I cannot blame him for it.

"My brother Dave came home last week and he and William lit the town up—'bit. William's wife. Lord. Some say it takes a man to move a mountain but I bet William's losses are not so great."

I wrote that down ten years ago in my journal. These are some of the common furies of these fields and this land— the fields, the land, again. We had thought that the furies had disappeared in this land because of the flatness of it. It is partly true and that makes it worse, and most of us don't even understand why or that there is this particular what to ask a why of. These fields and prairies that are this land here are steeped in history and therefore we are also. It is unfortunate because history destroys everything and it is unnatural, history does not belong. It is a protestant dictum that we should have it that way. But the history has already happened here so we can no longer influence it or stop it. Most of us here, of course, don't even think about this, not even up until we die. These are not meager things, they are liable to furious remembrance so they are able to hunt, be they ghosts or other fraught things or what they may be.

I was never hired for this covenant with record keeping. It's not so much a yoke on me. I just know what to tell. Well that is not true. I do know what to tell that is true. But that history being knowing what to tell is a load on me and it is on William and it is on his wife. And on Dave. I love Dave but he drifted a long time ago and I don't know him anymore. That is not a trifling thing to say of a brother, and it is not a trifling thing in point of fact, but so it is.

When he was young Dave read and read, he was the family bookworm. Then

the history took form in his mind, that of which he read, and he opted to that world, he let it do its unstoppable burial work in him. That history learned him. It learned him too hard. I know it did. I know what he was reading and I know who he was visiting nights and other times and it was not that his visited were bad because they weren't. I know. I know the whole story, by what sum has it been given to me to become the historian? I cannot go further now than to get into the deep earth of that which learned him too hard which is now supposed to allow comfort for me. That which after its destroying I've got to embrace to keep it away from the furious men of the day that still deny it.

It is maybe a trifle to some but it is a universal good thing when a man has a horse— for I will ride, book in mind, William in tail, Dave. . . Dave, I do not know where Dave will be when I ride. I hope he will be with William's wife down at the creek because she is a compassionate and soulful woman. And William is not a hurttable man.

I can no longer tell these words. I am tired. I lay me down to God's issuance and mercy that I do not repeat or cause the man-and-woman-belittling furies that we name history but which is really a terrible march. I finish—for the time apparently.

Two

Fallon was supposed to come around one day soon. He didn't come and that was not because he had not wanted to if he had wanted to.

Immediately, William wouldn't talk about Fallon's not-coming. William's wife Jennifer could tell stories of ferns and faeries and red squirrels and even forest boars and their young's but she could not comfort William the Unhurttable who was manly hurt if ever a man was manly hurt. Dave didn't take the bait and he did not answer letters. Lord knows Jennifer wrote enough of them to him. Fallon was gone. William was out of his God-stricken mind. Dave had other matters and did not yoke. As he never in his God-damned life had.

Those days as in all the other hard days that passed through my life I rode and did not stop until the horse knew when I could not. Horses sense a man's infirmities. I did keep the horse fed and watered though as we traversed the land. That I could do and it was that that was my job and my stewardship during those days during those rides 'till the horse knew when I could not. Which saved me each time.

When riding I had to feed off the sound of the aspen getting whirled and chopped by the wind. I had fed from it. I had yes I had. And there would be a time in my life when I could use it even if it had by then already done the drama of taking me until and to my last hour. One should not be surprised by this. 'Cept that I've known many people and you cannot tell about them always I have learned, for many are vehement. William's wife could relate all of this better than I, albeit I may hazard as any man, red squirrel or blue jay or aspen or not. Every man is equal in the eyes of God so why should he not be in the eyes of mine?

That for Fallon was a piece of granite for that equality to me— yon Jumbo, that was it. And now I remember. These arbiters of the human law always opt for a throne with a door just one step down from where they go to an Anteroom which stinks of prison sentences and bourbon deals that divide the heart. I am entitled to this reasoning yes I am. And I do feel the burden of some stewardship. I am an adult human being and that is about as serious and important as anything can be, although there are other serious and important things. Better to leave these things though.

These things count here and only here, but our 'here' is a sizeable place to be. It's meaningful and it's dreadful. It may seem puerile or insensate to bring these kinds of things up.

Yes I know. But I am forty and it may be that this is not for young men and women, I cannot tell the whole way of the things in front of me. I never could. Not since Fallon didn't come around and William went God-stricken mad as a hatter in the face of his mother and his wife and his little children. I look after them now. Yes, they have names. Why shouldn't they?

I do not rest in the semi-indifferent knowledge of Arabian sands. In me when peering for the blissful and callous indifference that some other men have. No it is just short of God I would say, forgive me for that—if it bears forgiving. I really did try.

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